

## Appendix A – GACOR Theology of Representation

The General Assembly Committee on Representation (GACOR) agreed that in the spirit of G-3.0103 and F-1.0403, there needed to be extended reflection on a theology of representation. We have a lot of well-meaning Presbyterians that get the need to be diverse and inclusive but do not possess the language or tool kit to do it effectively. A theology of representation creates a foundation for why we must do this work.

Beyond diversity, a theology of representation decentralizes systems of whiteness that historically normalize power structures in church and society based on the mythical norm “usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure.”<sup>1</sup> To this list we add: American-born, able-bodied, and cis-gendered privileges that must be recognized, mitigated, and dismantled to honor the multiplicity of God’s creation. A theology of representation is inspired by the God who calls us to do justice and is enacted in and embodied through the work of God’s people.

### Toward a theology of representation

Remembering that God’s blessed people are as numerous as the stars in heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore,<sup>2</sup> we believe that God’s promises are compelling and effective upon a vast array of persons whom God calls and God loves. God’s promises surpass human differences of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexuality, and the multiple identities shaped by those differences. This is the work of God, and it is marvelous in our sight.<sup>3</sup> God’s spirit is poured out on all flesh, empowering daughters and sons to prophesy, empowering our elders to dream dreams and our youth to see visions; God’s spirit is poured out on all flesh, including the most marginalized and subjugated among us – even and especially those who are to us like female and male slaves.<sup>4</sup>

The same Spirit that calls us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God,<sup>5</sup> is the Spirit that equips us with unique gifts and talents, making us the body of Christ, and each of us its members<sup>6</sup> - in all of our particularities and variabilities. Therefore, we cannot say to any of our members “I have no use for you.”<sup>7</sup> Rather, we are empowered, like the many people from the many nations who were together on the day of Pentecost, to speak with each other in our own languages and to be understood.

In the story of Pentecost, Luke is recalling the image of wind and fire in the context of multiple languages being spoken and, more importantly, understood by everyone that was present in

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<sup>1</sup> Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 116.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 22:16-17

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 118:(22,)23

<sup>4</sup> Joel 2:28

<sup>5</sup> Micah 6:8

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:27 (cf. Romans 12:5)

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:21-26

Jerusalem. A possible implication of this story is that Luke is associating communication in multiple languages with the presence of the divine. It is interesting that Luke is comparing the presence of multiple languages and ethnicities to fire and violent wind. This image takes on a new meaning in light of the extreme devastation caused by the recent wild fires in California and the destructive winds during recent hurricanes.

Luke's readers would have known that fire and wind are two vital elements of nature that are powerful and crucial to sustaining life. But that fire and wind can also be deeply destructive when they are not put to good use and nurtured carefully. Luke's point in using the imagery of fire and wind to characterize heteroglossia—multiple languages—might be that diversity—whether in terms of languages or race and ethnicities—can work either way too. Diversity can be put to good use with care and attention but can also be dysfunctional when not celebrated and appreciated fully.

The Roman empire learned it hard way. It was Rome's mishandling and a superficial celebration of diversity that, in part, brought the empire down. Rome invested a great deal of time and resources promoting a monolithic culture. It undertook an extensive propaganda to insist that smooth and efficient functioning of the empire necessitated promotion of linguistic and cultural homogeneity at the expense of marginal languages and identities. The story of Pentecost showcases a seemingly impossible phenomenon in which communication across disparate languages happens smoothly and people(s) of diverse nationalities share a space—literally and figuratively—with little difficulty. In doing so, Pentecost undermines Rome's case for cultural and linguistic homogeneity.

One of the central ideas that underlie Pentecost, one that was also at the center of vernacularization during Reformation, is that God can be expressed in multiple languages (2:11). And that precisely because God is often expressed in multiple languages, no single language can articulate the divine fully. Similarly, no single identity can capture or express the fullness of humanness. Luther recognized vernacularization as a necessary precondition for a fuller realization of life in the spirit. For him, accessibility was an essential aspect of democratization of the Church and for dismantling spiritual elitism. In this way, both Pentecost and Reformation decenter and deprivilege the dominant language and identity and affirm humanity in its various expressions.

Prior to reformation, the Church's approach to vernacular languages was influenced by the story of Babel that saw multiple languages as a manifestation of God's judgment. Reformation allowed people to move past that paradigm and embrace vernacular languages in the spirit of Pentecost. Just as Pentecost reversed Babel, Reformation took theology and scriptures to marginal languages. But it also brought those marginal languages to the center of theological discourses, with the result that the vernacular languages and identities are no longer tokens at the table but essential elements in theological discourse.

Luke tells us that when the unlettered Galileans spoke, everyone heard them in their own language. When did these Galileans learn so many languages? The Greek word Luke uses for multiple languages is heteroglossia: Heteroglossia is about each seeking and acquiring an ability to speak the language of the other. It is also about making an effort to enter the spaces of the other. It is equally about seeking and acquiring an ability to understand the other. In enabling people to speak in other tongues (2:4), the spirit makes them cross linguistic boundaries and learn, on a deeper level, languages whose presence and worth they would not have acknowledged hitherto.

The Spirit equips us to work together, share resources in common, and demonstrate our witness as followers of Jesus Christ who is God's love enfleshed deeply abiding with-in-through us,<sup>8</sup> all the way to the ends of the earth.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, it is to the ends of the earth and to all nations that Jesus Christ, our Savior and our friend, entrusted us with the commission to spread the gospel and model discipleship, baptizing in the name of the Creator, the Christ, and the Comforter, teaching by our own examples the love of God and of each other.<sup>10</sup> In the sacrament of baptism, we are claimed by the Holy Spirit into the priesthood of all believers, descending into the waters as Jesus Christ descended into death, rising into new life as Jesus Christ was raised by God on the day of his resurrection. We practice this worshipful remembrance in anticipation of God raising us on the day of Christ's return. In the sacrament of Communion, we give thanks (*eucharistō*) for Jesus Christ's willingness to allow himself be given over to the Empire that his resurrection would be proof that the forces of evil hegemony will never prevail. We give thanks that our Savior and our friend trusted us with the memory of his body broken and his blood shed, that we would recognize his death, in the broken bodies and shed blood of other human beings. We do the work he entrusted to us, looking forward to the great heavenly feast where all are welcome at the table, when Jesus is its host.

We believe that by God's divine pleasure, we are intentionally and uniquely called, gifted, prepared, and ready to participate in holy reconciliation with a broken and fearful world.<sup>11</sup> Jesus Christ, our Savior and our friend, modeled compassion for the marginalized, courage to challenge imperial powers on behalf of the least of these, and love toward one another. The yet-still-speaking-and-moving Spirit continually indicts and inspires us to recognize the intrinsic value of those who are different from us, and to respect our many members who co-create the body of Christ.

Glory be to the Creator, to the Christ, and to the Comforter. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> John 1:14; 15:1-11

<sup>9</sup> Acts 2, Acts 6, Acts 1:8

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 25:16-21; Mark 12:30-31/Matthew 22:36-40/Luke 10:27/John 13:34-35

<sup>11</sup> Brief Statement of Faith, 11.4

## INSERT Glossary

### Additional Scripture Identified by Committee Members as Relevant to the Work

- **Genesis 1** – *imago dei* and all creation's goodness, fall is corruption, peoples substituting their authority for God's, creating distorted structures, false meanings, hierarchies, etc.
- **Leviticus 19**—v.10,14-15, 32-34 in following God, church must witness against the powerful and privileged, not act against those with disability, aged, poor, alien
- **Jeremiah 29** – seeking welfare of city under occupation, peoples' well-being matters, disrupting empire
- **Isaiah 56** – house of prayer for all peoples
- **Psalms 146** – God protects strangers, lifts downtrodden, helps widows/orphans, blocks path of ungodly
- **Amos 7** – the plumb line, God's order is not ours and measures our rightness
- **Matthew 5** – turning cheeks, carrying two miles, etc., resisting empire and subverting oppression, turning tables using law of oppressor against it
- **Luke 4** – jubilee, anointed for liberation ministry, power disruption, justice...
- **Luke 8** – Gerasene demoniac, legion of oppressions and alienation created by possession, needing exorcism, restored and sent to his peoples, not allowed to stay in Christ's and the disciples' company
- **Luke 18** – No one is good but God alone, what is impossible for mortals is possible for God
- **Acts 6** – power sharing with marginalized placed in power over all community including the dominant
- **Acts 10** – Gospel without borders, God's clean is wider than humanity's – Spirit led 180° change in Peter's attitude/actions of how converts come to the community – visions on both sides bring connection

### Citations from the Confessions:<sup>12</sup>

- Confession of 1967: 9.12 – 9.55
- A Brief Statement of Faith: 11.4 (lines 65-71)
- Confession of Belhar: 10.3 – 10.8

### Suggested Readings

Ahmed, Sara. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

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<sup>12</sup> For full texts from the excerpts, see Appendix. For full confessions excerpted see *The Book of Confessions* (Presbyterian Church USA, 2016).

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## Appendix – Relevant Excerpts from the Book of Confessions of the PCUSA

**Confessions:** The committee's work is one way the PCUSA lives its confessions of faith...

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### **Confession of 1967: 9.12 – 9.55 (excerpted)**

#### *I. God's Work of Reconciliation, A. The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, 1. Jesus Christ*

9.12 *The reconciling act of God in Jesus Christ exposes the evil in men as sin in the sight of God. ...*

#### *I. God's Work of Reconciliation, B. The Communion of the Holy Spirit*

9.25 *The members of the church are emissaries of peace and seek the good of man in cooperation with powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics. But they have to fight against pretensions and injustices when these same powers endanger human welfare. Their strength is in their confidence that God's purpose rather than man's schemes will finally prevail.*

#### *II. The Ministry of Reconciliation, A. The Mission of the Church, 2. Forms and Orders*

9.34 *The institutions of the people of God change and vary as their mission requires in different times and places. The unity of the church is compatible with a wide variety of forms, but it is hidden and distorted when variant forms are allowed to harden into sectarian divisions, exclusive denominations, and rival factions.*

9.37 *...[Members'] daily action in the world is the church in mission to the world. The quality of their relation with other persons is the measure of the church's fidelity.*

9.40 *...A presbyterian polity recognizes the responsibility of all members for ministry and maintains the organic relation of all congregations in the church. It seeks to protect the church from exploitation by ecclesiastical or secular power and ambition. Every church order must be open to such reformation as may be required to make it a more effective instrument of the mission of reconciliation.*

#### *II. The Ministry of Reconciliation, A. The Mission of the Church, 4. Reconciliation in Society*

9.43 *In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations. ...*

9.44 *a. God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love, he overcomes the barriers between brothers and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. ...the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it. Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize their fellowmen, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess.*

- 9.46 *c. The reconciliation of man through Jesus Christ makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God's good creation. Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world's poor is the cause of his disciples. ...A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God.*
- 9.47 *d. ...The church, as the household of God, is called to lead men out of this alienation into the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ. Reconciled to God, each person has joy in and respect for his own humanity and that of other persons; ... The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by man when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time.*

## *II. The Ministry of Reconciliation, B. The Equipment of the Church*

- 9.48 *...the church is obliged to change the forms of its service in ways appropriate to different generations and cultures.*

## *III. The Fulfillment of Reconciliation*

- 9.53 *God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ embraces the whole of man's life: social and cultural, economic and political, scientific and technological, individual and corporate. It includes man's natural environment as exploited and despoiled by sin. It is the will of God that his purpose for human life shall be fulfilled under the rule of Christ and all evil be banished from his creation.*
- 9.54 *Biblical visions and images of the rule of Christ, such as a heavenly city, a father's house, a new heaven and earth, a marriage feast, and an unending day culminate in the image of the kingdom. The kingdom represents the triumph of God over all that resists his will and disrupts his creation. Already God's reign is present as a ferment in the world, stirring hope in men and preparing the world to receive its ultimate judgment and redemption.*
- 9.55 *With an urgency born of this hope, the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In steadfast hope, the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.*

### **A Brief Statement of Faith: 11.4** (lines 65-71, excerpted)

*In a broken and fearful world  
The Spirit gives us courage...  
...to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,  
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,  
and to work for justice, freedom and peace.*

## **Confession of Belhar: 10.3 – 10.8 (excerpted)**

### 10.3 We believe

- *that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;*
- *that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;*
- *that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted; ...*

### 10.4 Therefore, we reject any doctrine

- *which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, ...*
- *which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;*
- *which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;*
- *which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.*

### 10.5 We believe...

- *that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and ... will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world; ...*

### 10.7 We believe ...

- *that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.*

### 10.8 Therefore, we reject any ideology

- *which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.*

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